

Dear Appropriations Committee,

My name is Anne, I am a case manager for Columbus House Supportive Services for Veteran Families. Our work is specific to veterans who are homeless or about to be homeless. Columbus House has a mission *"To serve people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, by providing shelter and housing, and by fostering their personal growth and independence."*

I am writing to ask you to adjust the budget for FY23 (through HB 5037) to fund our front line workers combatting housing insecurity by providing \$13.34 million dollars to housing services, to expand the Coordinated Access Network, to increase the number of Rental Assistance Program vouchers, and to establish an eviction prevention partnership as part of the Reaching Home agenda.

How do we serve those who are homeless or at risk? This is not a simple answer because ultimately, we are dealing with the largest variable humans. Numbers and data will show this need is ongoing and certainly as the pandemic has gone on are projected to be increasing at a larger rate. I want to talk about the guts of what we do as case managers and service providers. We are a housing first program which you will find has been the most successful model thus far. Housing first allows people to be "human" first and then address more than their basic needs. When I meet with a client for the first time there is so much to learn. How did they end up in their situation, who do they have for support, is there mental illness or substance use and was it all happenstance? If I could present to you today a truth: Most of my clients have had or do have all these issues but that is no different than anyone I have ever met homeless or not. Prior to COVID19 there is data that suggests up to 75% of average American households were living paycheck to paycheck. According to a CNBC report "Nearly two-thirds of Americans, 63%, say they've been living paycheck to paycheck since the Covid-19 pandemic hit the U.S. earlier this year" (Leonhardt, 2020) And prior to COVID-19 the same report notes "And for many Americans, the financial squeeze is less about personal choices and more about the rising cost of living — including food, housing, education and medical expenses. Stagnant wages also play a role" (Leonhardt, 2020).

In a country where that much of the population is living paycheck to paycheck that makes it clear that anyone your "average joe" is at risk of becoming homeless. Please think carefully about how you consider what a homeless person looks like. That person could be me; it could be an associate and let us be honest at a time like this with COVID-19 and the cost of medical care in our country well this leaves more people at risk than not. We cannot afford to put a stigma on homelessness, many of my clients are veterans of war, sure there may be a veteran who found themselves in a situation due to SUD, but these people are not like that. We are talking about young families; we are talking about a person who was a landlord and suddenly one thing happens, and they are living in their car. We are looking at people who have lost most all their family and they have no supports left here to ask for help. We are talking about men and women and families that care and have pride, they would never not want to work and provide for themselves, but it is a snowball effect. Is the homeless person who manages to keep a vehicle better than the one who doesn't have a car? Is the man who worked in the city with a good paying job but was laid off or their job was eliminated so they could bring in a new person to do the job (with a new title) for ½ the money?

If you want to know why nonprofits need the funding as those of us, we have served and those of us who do this work daily. We are working three times harder than ever before with larger case loads and the same quality is expected. If you cannot pay people who do this job a decent wage, they can go somewhere else with less demand and stress. We need to have conscientious case managers who are not just people who can be trained to do the job (anyone can do the job we have learned we are replaceable) however, you cannot teach people to care. Has anyone calculated how much it costs to spend time training new employees only to

have them leave because of the demand and lack of incentive? Why not pay them their worth at the start? Why else do nonprofits need money? Listen carefully to those who speak today who have been on the receiving side of the services we provide, that is the answer. Many clients know if not for our support they would not be able to start fresh and become independent again. As humans in 2022 we should not ask veterans or others to live in unreasonable conditions, or to be without food or basic needs. With the assistance of programs like ours we can help someone remember they are a valuable member of the world; we can provide them with stability and an address and health care which allows them to apply for jobs and get clean and become self-sufficient. Did you ever buy a basic need like soap, shampoo or toilet paper and realize when you went home you had plenty? You then think to yourself, well it isn't like I will not use it. Our services are like this, there is no money that you can offer that will ever go to waste. Columbus House is ethically sound, and their mission is clear, if not for them I would not be able to do what I do. To be a small part of this is a blessing. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Anne

References

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/254610/WHOMSD?sequence=1>

Leonhardt, M. (2020, December 11). 63% of Americans have been living paycheck to paycheck since Covid

hit. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/11/majority-of-americans-are-living-paycheck-to-paycheck-since-covid-hit.html>